3. Wilderness and Hebrew Bible Religion – fertility, apostasy and religious transformation in the Pentateuch

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1. Introduction[1]

This paper investigates the construction and function of 'wilderness' in Hebrew Bible religion.[2] In Hebrew Bible research history, the desert wilderness has been seen as ancient Israel's formative environment and as decisive for the development of its distinctive religion.[3] The idea that "Israelite religion" was unique in its ancient Near Eastern context because of its formative, desert wilderness experience has also played a seminal role in the history of religions (e.g., Segal this vol., Partridge 2004,8–11), just as it has appeared in recent discussions about religion and nature.[4] In order to approach the question of the construction and function of wilderness in Hebrew Bible religion, I analyse here a selection of epitomical wilderness narratives from the Pentateuch / Torah by means of a perspective that draws on the religion and nature field and critical spatiality theory. I argue that the wilderness is, in these texts, primarily used to establish Yahweh as the donor of agricultural fertility, and to communicate an ethos of religious identity transformation, the aim

1 I wish to thank Catherina Raudvere, Iram Asif, and Kirsten Nielsen for fruitful comments.

2 The term "Hebrew Bible religion" is explained in section 2. This study assumes that *midbār* in the Torah, the area that Israel travels through on the journey from Egypt to the promised land, can usefully be analysed as 'wilderness'.

3 See Hiebert 1996, 9–12. The idea that Israel's religion could only be understood in the context of desert nomadism, and its "historical consciousness" as forged in "the furnace of the desert", goes back, at least to A. Alt (1925, 1934), but was popularized in Frankfort (1949); see also de Vaux 1968. The related "desert ideal hypothesis" has a long history (K. Budde 1895, J.W. Flight 1923, Bright 1975, et al.); references in Cohn 1981 and Talmon1966.

4 The debates in the wake of the Lynn White thesis (White 1967), see (Kalland 2005).

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of which is to ensure Israel's continued access to the fruits of the agricultural land. These two uses of the wilderness space have implications for traditional accounts of Hebrew Bible religion, as it has traditionally, in biblical studies, been characterised as a religion which attributes little significance to the nonhuman world (including agriculture cf. Hiebert 1996),[5] as well as for the understanding of the role of wilderness, which has predominantly been seen as negative domain. Previous treatments have not paid much attention to the impact of the wilderness narratives on the process of reception or its functions for religious identity formation.

2. Approaching Wilderness and Hebrew Bible Religion

Biblical studies have focused on discussing whether attitudes towards the wilderness in the Hebrew Bible are positive or negative, and on the wilderness as a concrete, geophysical space and historical period. Contrariwise, I argue that the wilderness is presented in an ambiguous way and that there is a need to move away from seeing it as an either predominantly negative (e. g., Talmon 1966) or predominantly positive space (the "nomadic ideal" theory in exegesis, e. g., Budde; de Vaux; references in Talmon 1966), or in terms of a simple cosmos/chaos dichotomy (Pedersen 1958–1960; Brueggemann 1977, 29[6]). To properly un-

5 Contrariwise, environmentalist literature has seen strong ties between Judaism, Christianity and Islam and agriculture, and viewed agriculture as inherently expansionist and imperialist (Nash 2001; Oelschlaeger 1991; cf. Taylor this volume). In environmental writing and ecocriticism, wilderness is seen as a notion based on an agricultural economy (Oelschlaeger 1991, 28; Garrard 2004,60). According to this view, the implication of the agricultural construction of 'home' vs. 'wilderness' is that agricultural life becomes a struggle *against nature*, and so the transition from hunter-gatherer to agriculture is a fall from a primal ecological grace. In this way, agriculture becomes the cause and the symptom of an anthropocentric alienation from the earth which was completed by monotheistic religion and eventually modern science (Garrard 2004,60–61). This view is in some ways problematic (Garrard 2004,61).

6 An exception is Jensen (2000), who notes the ambiguity of the desert, but does not investigate the wilderness per se. Talmon has rightly criticized the theory of a "desert ideal" or "nomadic ideal" in the Hebrew Bible (Talmon 1966). Instead, he argues that the view of the wilderness is predominantly negative (Talmon 1966, 48; Talmon in TWAT s.v. *midbār*; he is followed by Cohn 1981). I think there is reason to ask why, then, is the wilderness the primary arena for the encounter of deity and people and for communication between deity and

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derstand the religious construction and function of the wilderness of the Hebrew Bible, it does not suffice to look at its historical-political[7] or geographical aspects only. On the other hand, seeing the wilderness as a literary motif (Schofield 2008 and Talmon 1966) or as an imagined space (as in a cosmological approach) only,[8] also leaves important aspects of these texts out of sight: the wilderness as a concrete, geophysical area, its climate and materiality. While newer studies document more diversity in the biblical attitudes to wilderness and a broader range of scholarly interests (Leal 2006, 55–56; Lee 2008; Schofield 2008[9]), Cohn's 1981 study is still the only study that investigates the religious use of the wilderness and engages perspectives from the study of religion. He demonstrates that the wilderness period fits van Gennep's triparte model as a liminal space, and he models Israel's journey from Egypt, through the wilderness, to the promised land as a *rite de pas-*

people in the Pentateuch? I also question Talmon's evaluation of the wilderness chronotope as having an "untergeordnete Stellung", a "beschränkten Stellenwert", in the Hebrew Bible (Talmon TWAT 686) – considering that almost all of Ex, Lev, Num and Dt are set in the wilderness, as well as his conclusion that since Israel spent only 40 years in the desert, then it is of little importance (Talmon TWAT 686). This seems not to do justice to the great amount of textual attention spent on the wilderness in the Hebrew Bible.Brueggemann sees wilderness as the "historical form" of chaos, as formless and lifeless (Brueggemann 1977, 29). Pedersen sees the wilderness as a negative, chaotic domain of curse (1958–1960); his view has been criticised by Addinall (1981).

7 T. Dozeman's insightful book *God at War* (1996) treats many wilderness texts, arguing that the "rise of the wilderness tradition in the Pentateuch is an exilic innovation by deuteronomistic tradents" (Dozeman 1996, 95–96). Yet, he does not engage the wilderness as a space or the importance of the nonhuman world in the wilderness traditions, but relates them to ideas of historiography and salvation history. In his assessment, however, the "rise of the wilderness" is, in the Pentateuch, "its most significant addition for constructing theology" (Dozeman 1996,179), thus attributing space social significance (cf. also Dozeman 1989).

8 Cohn 1981 veers in this direction.

9 These authors suggest that neither the negative nor the positive view of Israel's desert experience is adequate, and yet they do not treat the religious function of the wilderness, nor the spatial and material aspects of the Hebrew Bible wilderness and its focus on the non-human world. Lee (2008) understands the wilderness narratives through the lens of Yahweh's "punishment and forgiveness", focusing on the theological message. R.B. Leal has recently, in a work of eco-theology, demonstrated the diversity of the attitudes to the wilderness in the Hebrew Bible (2006). Yet, he understands the wilderness as a real space and does not offer detailed analyses of the texts or the wilderness' religious functions.

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sage/paysage. This valuable analysis, however, does not address the concrete-material aspects of the wilderness space and the images of the nonhuman world used,[10] or its religious instrumentality beyond what is general to (all) liminal spaces.

What is so interesting about the Hebrew Bible desert wilderness is exactly that it oscillates between a real and a fantasmatic presentation, in between cosmology, literary motif, spatial practice and geography. It retains references to and elements of realistic geographical space while also being the primary site of fantastic marvels[11] in the Hebrew Bible. The basic motivation for this paper comes from recent developments in the field of religion and nature which guide my interest in the presentation of the materiality, climate and modes of interaction with the nonhuman world, rather than previous dichotomizing ideas of culture vs. nature.[12] A view of humanity and culture as inseparable from the nonhuman world, as *not* distinct from 'nature', but as implicated and involved in, always interacting with, its environment, has become commonplace in the 'religion and nature' field (Taylor 2005) as in other current investigations of climate and environment (Jasanoff 2010, Ingold 2000, et al.) The decisive theoretical inspiration and methodology for this study comes, however, from the larger field of "the spatial turn in the social sciences" and the application of this theoretical perspective by scholars of religion and anthropologists. Critical spatiality theory has, in the last decade, become an important influence in many fields, including biblical studies (Camp 2002, Berquist and Camp 2008, Lied 2008, George 2009). The major point of critical spatiality theory is that space, like history and society, is always construct-

10 For Cohn, "history" is still the organizing principle for religion in the Hebrew Bible (Cohn 1981,1).

11 I here use the words marvels or fantastic events to designate those elements of the texts traditionally designated 'miracles'. For arguments in favour of a change of vocabulary, see Feldt 2011a.

12 Wilderness does not equate with the idea of nature. It is conventionally seen as those parts of nature that are largely free of human influence (Oelschlaeger 2005). I use the term 'non-human world' in line with the insight that humans are always involved and engaged in relations with the nonhuman world; that humans do not belong to a realm of 'culture' that is separable from 'nature'. The concept of 'nature' has played a tremendous role in Hebrew Bible research vis-à-vis the concept of 'history' (cf. Simkins 1994, Hiebert 1996,4–22), and for that reason I sometimes use also the term 'nature' to communicate that my results may have implications for previous research involving this dichotomy.

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ed[13] and produced in social practice and that it must therefore be theorized. Like many other areas of scholarly inquiry, the field of biblical studies has been dominated by an interest in history and sociality, while the dimension of space has received less attention. The work of philosopher Henri Lefebvre and geographer Edward W. Soja demonstrates that space is not a mental construct alone, it is also always material, and representations of space in social thought and practice cannot be understood as projections of modes of thinking independent of socio-material conditions (Soja 1989,124–126; Lefebvre 1991). Soja, building upon the work of Lefebvre, introduces a useful tripartite strategy for the analysis of social space (Soja 1996), which, I contend, will benefit this investigation of the religious instrumentality of the wilderness in the Hebrew Bible.

Soja's theory hinges on a tripartite approach to space as *Firstspace*, *Secondspace* and *Thirdspace*, a distinction which is indebted to Lefebvre's distinctions between perceived space, conceived space and lived space. Firstspace concerns the concrete materiality of spatial forms, the geophysical realities as empirically observable, Secondspace involves imagined space, ideas and representations of space in mental or cognitive forms, while Thirdspace designates the lived experience of social space, the lived realities as practiced.[14] Thirdspace is a creative recombination that builds on both Firstspace and Secondspace and, as such, it moves beyond the alternatives of describing spatiality only as material, physical, or as an imagined, mental construct (Soja 1996; Camp 2002; Lied 2005). Thirdspace is a term pointing to space as practiced in the lifeworlds of human beings; the field of social spatiality that uses and incorporates Firstspace and Secondspace aspects, but which cannot be reduced to the combination of the two (Lied 2005,108). In actual, human practice, these aspects cannot be separated. For purposes of analysis, however, they may be usefully distinguished.

This theory formation offers inspiration for approaching the construction of the wilderness space in the Hebrew Bible, but because the wilderness space is a narrated space, in which all three kinds of spatial aspects are intermingled, I supplement critical spatiality theory with

13 That space is culturally constructed is of course a commonplace insight. Many anthropologists (and narratologists, cf. Bal 1997) use the helpful distinction between place and space (e.g. Kirby 2009), which I do not engage here.

14 As mentioned by C. Camp, Jim Flanagan has helpfully dubbed these aspects material space, designed space and lived space (Camp 2002).

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insights from the narratology of Mieke Bal (1997).[15] For the purposes of the present analysis, I approach *Firstspace* as the concrete, geophysical and geographical materiality of the land areas or spaces mentioned in the texts.[16] As for *Secondspace*, it is not correct simply to equate written texts, especially of the canonised sort, with Secondspace, on the assumption that "if it is written, it must be conceptualized" and accordingly Secondspace, as Claudia Camp notes, for the boundaries between the three aspects of spatiality collapse in any actual text. Narrative literature "may create "worlds", in which recipients and personae may "live"" (Camp 2002); narrative literature may supply models (which may come to function as Secondspatial paradigms) for thinking thirdspatially and be a site of Thirdspace experience, but may also incorporate thirdspatial aspects. In narrative (as elsewhere), spatialities are always intervowen in complex ways, and narratives may be important sites of negotiation and struggle between spatial aspects.[17] The texts' secondspace aspects will, for these reasons, here be treated by focusing on those spatial models and conceptual, geographical 'systems' (itineraries, maps) used to explain and think space that are drawn upon in the texts (George 2009, 25–27; Bal 1997, 214–216) for instance ideas of spatial oppositions between city-land, land-desert, the sown-unsown, political oppositions like hostile vs. friendly that may be ascribed to them, and other ways of speaking of, thinking about, and measuring space; or spatial paradigms, for instance of mountains or "Egypt", as represented in the texts.[18] Since Secondspace aspects represent a discourse of power (Soja 1996, Camp 2002 and 2008), a dominating appropriation of space, I combine the above with attention to the story-level utterances

15 Thus, I do not adhere strictly to Soja's theory, but use his tripartite approach to space strategically, akin to Bal's tripartite approach to narrative (text, story and fabula) – as different aspects that never appear separate in any text, but which may be distinguished for the purpose of analysis.

16 As a combination of archaeological and other knowledge of the area with information supplied in the text. This is far from simple – cf. Lied 2005, 108 note 30.

17 The Hebrew Bible is a good example of a text collection that bears the stamp of official religion, while nevertheless expressing many heterogenous voices – this is recognized both by the Documentary Hypothesis in standard biblical studies, and by Bakhtinian approaches in literary approaches to the biblical texts.

18 Bal distinguishes analytically between fabula, story, and text in the analysis of narrative (Bal 1997); for an extensive introduction to Bal's narratology, see Feldt 2011c. Both the fabula's construction of location/place, and the 'story'-layer's construction of 'space' are relevant in analysis (Bal 1997, 132–141 and 214–216).

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of narrator and deity about the wilderness space as important indicators about the texts' surface ideology and spatial ideals,[19] on the assumption that the deity and narrator represent authoritative voices in these religious texts. I attend to the texts' *thirdspatial* aspects by looking at expressions of lived experience, emotion, sensation, opinion, and the like in the embedded character reactions and utterances, which I take to point towards (models of and models for) the reception and use of the wilderness in lived religious space.[20] My focus is here on how the characters experience (in sight, hearing, touch, etc.) and perceive space as expressed in their utterances and reactions. Further, I approach the texts with a narratology-based assumption that the events happening in a particular place, and how the characters react to them, are just as important in a spatial analysis of narrative as are straightforward descriptions of space (cf. Bal 1997, 134–137), an assumption which is in accord with critical spatiality theory (Soja 1996, 65–70, Camp 2002). Therefore, I hope to bring out what the events of the wilderness, as well as the personae reactions and utterances, communicate about the wilderness and its religious function. My assumption is that this approach may illumine how the texts aim to influence the process of reception and the lived space of their intended recipients, as well as bear witness to the social space of their author-redactors – the spaces in which, from which, these seminal wilderness texts were produced and used.

As for the material, the Pentateuch is the composite result of multiple writings, rewritings, redactions etc., and I read it here in the Masoretic edition,[21] as a composite, redacted text, and I take it to speak of the

19 Importantly, these may be qualified, contested, questioned or backed up in other discourse.

20 In making such a distinction, and assuming that the reactions of Israel reflect and model the texts' (intended) recipients, it is of course important not to lose sight of the fact that "Israel" and the reactions of the "Israelites" in the texts are textual constructions. Importantly, the secondspace aspects may be qualified, contested, questioned or backed up in other discourse, cf. in a narratological perspective, Bal 1997,25, 34, 43–50, 52–61.

21 The Pentateuch/Torah is a collectivity of text types – mythology, ritual text, wisdom, song, poetry, etc. – and in all likelihood put together from a diversity of sources. Further, as for manuscripts, there is no "the text", only copies of copies of copies, but it is clear that *a* final edited form appeared in the Common Era (while elements of the texts of course represent older traditions). The Masoretic text forms the basis for this study, even if it reflects exegesis and does not present "the original text"; the absence of original texts (the composite text as the condi-

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late author/redactors and recipients of this version, on the assumption that the Pentateuch as a "collectivity … invites interpretation" for the study of religion (quote in Leach 1987, 581; Hendel 2005,96–98), while recognizing its basic multifariousness (cf. Hendel 1997). My theoretical object is the use of 'wilderness' in Hebrew Bible religion. 'Hebrew Bible religion' is a shorthand term for the various idealized practices and ditto theologies expressed in the anthology of texts known as the Hebrew Bible,[22] and the role that the wilderness plays in and for it. While wilderness texts are found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the Pentateuch represents the richest and most complete development of wilderness traditions in the Hebrew Bible. I focus here on sections of texts which frame and epitomize the wilderness experience, namely the stories of Israel's entry into the wilderness and Yahweh's revelation on Mt. Sinai, Ex 15,22-Ex 19, as well as the stories that relate Israel's departure from Sinai and first glimpses of the promised land, Num 11–14.

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tion for the process of reception) is a feature Hebrew Bible study shares with the study of cuneiform literature (Feldt 2006a; Feldt 2012,87; Carr 2010). The composite, redacted version is also worth investigating in terms of its effects on the process of reception. It has been demonstrated that Hebrew Bible narrative is textual-literary in character (Kawashima 2004, van der Toorn 2007) and the ancient use of scrolls of "books" is well-documented (Propp 1999,39–54). On the textualization of religion in the late 1st millennium, see Schaper 2009, van der Toorn 2007, Veldhuis 2003.

22 "Hebrew Bible religion" differs from "Israelite religion", which is the hypothetical, reconstructed religion of the ancient "Israelites". The sources for Israelite religion are not only the Hebrew Bible texts but also archaeological material from the relevant epochs, but the reconstruction of "Israelite religion" or the" history of religion of Israel" is, unfortunately, often based on a more or less uncritical acceptance of the image given in the Hebrew Bible (Jensen 1998, 13). As H.J.L. Jensen explains, it is debatable whether the Hebrew Bible refers to any actually existing ethnic group by the name of Israel, or whether "Israel" is primarily constructed by the Hebrew Bible (Jensen 1998, 17). The Hebrew Bible is a religious anthology aiming to promote and maintain proper worship of the deity Yahweh. It addresses itself to the group "Israel" which worships the deity Yahweh, or which ought to do so. The texts postulate that this group possesses a common identity genealogically (common ancestors), historically (common experiences), territorially (common land), and religiously (common worship) (Jensen 1998). The authors/redactors stand at a considerable distance from the time when the narrated events purportedly took place, and the texts in their composite form therefore speak of the world of their relatively late author/redactors and their situatedness in early Judaism.

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3. Analyses

First, I analyse the desert wilderness as represented in terms of firstspatial, geophysical materiality and human ways of interacting with it in the selected texts in combination with archaeological and geographical information. Afterwards, I attend to the events, actions and experiences that characterise the wilderness.

3. a. The desert wilderness – firstspace aspects

As table 1 demonstrates, the desert wilderness (*midbār*) is, in the selected texts, presented in primarily realistic terms, as a vast, waterless expanse where the sun burns. The desert dryness is interrupted by occasional oases.

Table 1. Verbalization

Terms used	*midbār* (passim)
1. Climate, materiality, nature	– Burning sun (Ex 16,3) – Vast expanse (Ex 15,22), large distances (e.g., Ex 16,1) – An oasis of 12 springs and 70 palms at Elim (Ex 15,27) – Uninhabited (wilderness vs. settled land (*ʾereṣ nôšāvet* (*yšb*)) Ex 16,35) – Dryness and lack of water, bitter water (Ex 15,22–26) – A mountain in the wilderness of Sinai (Ex 19,2.4) – Lack of (varied) food (Num 11), an alimentary lack of variety: it lacks grain, figs, grapes, pomegranates, water, miserable food (Num 11,5; 20,4–5) – Dew falls on the camp in the morning (Num 11,9) – Yahweh descends in a cloud (Num 11,25) – A storm from Yahweh with quails from the sea (Num 11,31) – Snakes (Num 20,6–9)

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Table 1. Verbalization *(Continued)*

Terms used	*midbār* (passim)
2. 'Geographical' interaction with the wilderness / ways of moving about	– Movement from specified place to specified place (*passim*) (e.g., Yam-Suf (Ex 15,22) to *midbār Šur* (Ex 15,22) to Mara (Ex 15,23), to Elim (Ex 15,22), to *midbār* Sin (Ex 16,1); Massa and Meriba (Ex 17,7); Num 9,15–23; Num 10,11–13; Num 11,35; Num 12,16)); Tabera (Num 11,3); Kibrot-HaTa'ava (Num 11,34–35); Haserot (Num 11,35); *midbār Pā'rān* (Num 12,16; 13,3); Kadesh (Num 13,26); *hammidbār derek yam-sûp* the wilderness by the way to *yam-sûp* (Num 14,25) – Camping in the wilderness of Sinai across from the mountain (Ex 19,1–2); camp-space (Num 11,1–3) – their children must live as shepherds in the wilderness for forty years (Num 14,33) – wilderness as site of death as Yahweh's punishment for the Israelites' 'fornication' (disobedience, faithlessness) (Num 14,33–35)
3. Temporal	– Extended time period (Israel spends 40 years in the wilderness, Ex 16,35)[23] – Large scale temporal notices: In the third month after the departure from Egypt, they enter the wilderness of Sinai (Ex 19,1); on the first day of the second month of the second year after Israel left Egypt (Num 1,1)

As we see above, the texts do not offer many, detailed descriptions of the wilderness' materiality, climate and other physical conditions. The

23 A fantasmatic time period roughly corresponding to one generation. Human reproduction ceases while in the wilderness (no births take place there) (Cohn 1981,16); this lends the wilderness a temporal 'specialness'. The normal life cycle resumes upon entry into the land (Josh 5,5–7).

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wilderness is not to any great extent described as 'nature'.[24] The representation of the desert space clearly retains enough geophysical description to appear as a realistic space. While there are many itinerary notices in the texts, and while they may communicate a pattern of significance (Davies 1983),[25] what is of importance here is that the journey is portrayed as taking place in a realistic space characterized by dryness, by its large size, by being uninhabited, unsown, and characterised by nomadic movement. Yet, as is apparent from the table above, what is in primary focus for the author/redactors is the desert wilderness' lack of food and water. The prime attention is focused on the alimentary area.

The word *midbār* used in these texts is also the most commonly used word for the desert wilderness in the Hebrew Bible overall (Talmon in TWAT s.v. 665).[26] S. Talmon has summarized the geophysical and material denotation of the word *midbār* in the Hebrew Bible (Talmon TWAT; see also Talmon 1966) as representing dry and semidry regions, which cannot be used for agricultural purposes, but which is sometimes used as grazing land for small flocks of goats and sheep (Talmon TWAT s.v. 664). As such, it could also be translated 'steppe' (Talmon 1966, 40). The majority of the occurrences of *midbār* in the Hebrew Bible designate this "drift" area, which is situated between the cultivated land and the desert proper; a space adjacent to the settlement or camp, but not a part of it (Talmon 1966, 41). *midbār* is, however, also used to designate the desert proper, the arid and desolate zones beyond the drift (Talmon 1966, 41). Often, when *midbār* and related words are used, it is the lack of water that is stressed (TWAT 668). However, it is important to also note that *midbār* also designated areas within "the land" proper. The boundaries between the agricultural land and the *midbār* were thus to a certain extent fluid and moveable (Talmon TWAT 671; Pastor 1997, 1–12). On the one hand, *midbār* areas could impinge on the areas of cultivated land in times of drought;

24 This is further highlighted by comparison with, for instance, the descriptions of the mountain forest wilderness of Sumerian religious texts (*Inana and Ebih*; *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*, Black et al. eds. 1998).

25 According to Davies, the itinerary notices are redactional and function to tie together material as points on a route, they give the impression of a meaningful whole and a purpose to the diverse material, and thus they contribute to the task of restoring "the morale of the Judaean people" (Davies 1983, 8–13).

26 While *midbār* is used 271 times in the Hebrew Bible texts and *ʿarābāh* 59 (60) times and *šemāmāh* 57 times, the other related words like *yᵉšîmôn* are used comparatively little (13 times; *ṣiyyāh* 15 times) (TWAT 667–8).

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on the other *midbār* areas could, in some places of ancient Palestine, be transformed into cultivated land by means of irrigation (Pastor 1997, 10–12). Sheep and goat pastoralism and sedentary agriculture were always closely integrated practices in the Levant (Hiebert 1996,19–21; Bar-Yosef and Khazanov 1992). These concrete features of the landscape and climate of ancient Palestine, and the mixed ways of interacting with it, did of course not determine a specific wilderness conception, but provided a certain possibility of form, which must be taken into account (cf. Pedersen in this volume). The texts' alimentary perspective on the *midbār*, as well as the location of *midbār* as mobile, are important features to keep in mind. Now, I move to the actions and utterances of the personae.

3.b. Second- and Third-space aspects

I attend here to the events happening in the wilderness – and how the characters react to them – on the assumption that they are just as important as geographical description (cf. above). I will try to bring out how the narrative text functions as an arena for negotiation and contestation between spatial aspects as suggested above in the strategy of analysis.

A Entry into the wilderness – Exodus 15,22–16,36

In these chapters, Israel's first entry into the desert is narrated, and we are given the primary coordinates of the desert in the Hebrew Bible imaginary. When we examine the events, actions and the utterances of the characters represented as taking place in the wilderness, we see that the wilderness is, above all, the space of the deity's *marvellous events* and Israel's *reactions of rejection* (table 2). I take the characters' utterances and actions as indicative of thirdspace aspects, while I take the use of spatial paradigms and the utterances and actions of the deity and narrator as indicative of secondspace aspects.[27]

27 I have opted to include only the deity's and Israel's actions and utterances in table 2. The narrator is of course also relevant, but the narrator seems here primarily to offer support for the deity's voice. The other characters will be drawn in *ad hoc.* Moses occupies an interesting intermediary position, as he of course expresses textual ideals to some extent (note the frequent blurring between Yahweh and Moses), while also modelling recipient reactions in relation to the wil-

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Table 2. Actions, reactions, utterances about the wilderness

Yahweh's actions and utterances	
1. Marvels/fantastic events:	*Alimentary marvels:* General: provides food and drink for a hyperbolic amount (cf. Ex 12,37)[28] of people and livestock (Ex 16,32), (Ex 17/) Bitter water to fresh water (Ex 15,22–25); Manna falls like dew (rain) in the morning in specific quantities (16,4.13–14); it rots and stinks and attracts maggots/ if stored (16,19); it comes in double amounts the day before Shabbat (16,22–24); it was like coriander seed, white, and it tasted like honey cakes (Ex 16,31). The sudden appearance of a flock of quails at the campsite (Ex 16,2–13); Provides water from a rock (17,5–6) *'Natural phenomenon'/'climate' marvels:* the pillar of cloud appears during the day to guide the Israelites (13,21–22); Yahweh communicates in the cloud pillar regularly (Ex 33,7–23)]; guidance (Ex 13,17; 16,32); the deity is accessible, available as/through cloud/fire pillars (13,22; 16,10) the pillar of fire appears during the night to guide the Israelites (Ex 13,21–22);

derness experiences. His persona is an interesting medium for negotiation of spatial aspects.

28 Ex 12,37 states that the number of Israelites involved in the Exodus was about 600,000 men. If they were married with families, then the total number would have been about two or three million people, plus cattle. Many commentators since Reimarus have noted the impossibility that numbers of this size could have been sustained with food and water for forty years in the desert (e.g., Johnstone 1990, 27 f). Num 1–4 confirm the number. The magnitude is conscious and purposeful. Grabbe calls attention to the normal size of armies in antiquity, which makes the numbers even more phantasmatic, and the lack of fear of Israel in other ethnic groups unbelievable (Grabbe 2000), and, I add, this also makes Israel's own doubt and lack of trust in the deity even more unbelievable. Meyers makes the good point that the great number points towards an inclusion of later groups of Israelites in the Exodus event (Meyers 2005,100).

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Other actions/utterances:	*'Political' marvels:* Unspecified and ambiguous supernatural help in the war against Amalek (17,8–16)[29] Threatens Israel with diseases (Ex 15,26)[30] The wilderness trek is a deliberate detour (Ex 13,17); to make Israel wander aimlessly or confused (Ex 14,3); to test Israel (Ex 15,25–26) The purpose of the manna marvel is to test Israel, whether they will 'walk in my law/ instruction' or not (Ex 16,4) When the Israelites eat manna until they are full, then they will understand that Yahweh is their god (Ex 16,12) Reminders about Sabbath rest (Ex 16,28–29)
Israel's / the people's actions and utterances	Wandering (passim), successive camps / nomadic movement (passim), they break camp, wander, and rest when Yahweh's cloud communicates it[31] Complaint, doubt, apostasy (Ex 15,24; 16,2.8; 17,1–4; 17,7) Purpose of the wilderness trek according to Israel: to let us die from hunger (Ex 16,3) Hunger (Ex 16,3), nostalgia for the flesh pots of Egypt (Ex 16,3) Wonder at the marvel of manna (Ex 16,14–15); gathering manna (Ex 16,17–18) Disobedience/rule breaking (Ex 16,20.27–30)

As we see in table 2 above, the events that are characteristic of the wilderness are marvels, and the type of experience and reaction, for the human recipients, are alimentary deprivation and apostasy. The subject matter of the central marvels in the wilderness has been overlooked as communication about the wilderness. The primary subject matter of the marvels is alimentary – manna, water, and birds. The other marvels of the stories are also 'nature'-related marvels; e. g., the pillar of cloud and of fire communicate that Yahweh is present. Clearly, the nonhuman world is a primary arena of Yahweh's activity.

The alimentary type of fantastic event in Ex 16 represents a systematic inversion of what constitutes ordinary food according to the Hebrew Bible: manna is an imaginary, fantastic type of bread raining from the sky. It is a type of food which, contrary to ordinary types of food, does

29 For an analysis, see Feldt 2012.
30 There is a textual ambiguity as to whether this is uttered by Moses or Yahweh.
31 See also (Ex 17,1; Ex 40,34–38; Num 21,10–15), (Num 9,15–23).

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not require work (cf. Gen. 3:17), it is free, it is collected, not harvested, and it cannot be stored[32] and it is a type of food which is in adequate supply.[33] In all of these respects, manna is oppositional to ordinary bread and it represents a systematic inversion of the normal in the Hebrew Bible: agriculture and subsequent bread-making (H.J.L. Jensen 2000, 39). In Ex 16, the manna is a curious, benign wonder, which attests to the deity's care for the people in the wilderness. The manna ceased upon Israel's entry into the promised land (Josh. 5:11–12; Ex 16:35) and this supernatural food characterises the wilderness wanderings more than anything. Here, in Ex 16, we get a predominantly positive story of the manna as a benign wilderness marvel. Ex 16:22–30 connects manna and the Sabbath and establishes the creation cycle of work and rest (Gen. 2:2–3) in the world (W.H.C. Propp 1999, 598),[34] as well as a weekly wilderness memorial practice.

The appearance of the flock of birds is equally oppositional to ordinary forms of food production in that it is also work-free and inverts not only cattle farming but also hunting, in that the prey here approaches the hunter, not the other way around. The water produced from the rock by striking it with the staff (Ex 17,1–7) also represents a magical-miraculous type of nourishment, which is work-free, instantly produced and which is oppositional to the ordinary means of procuring water. As such, all three types of alimentary marvels represent inversions of the ordinary, everyday world of agriculture. They communicate not only who is the lord of agriculture and 'natural' fertility: Yahweh, but also what Israel desires from its deity: 'natural' fertility and food. Ordinary, agricultural food production is here filmed over with the fantastic. The wilderness marvels point to Yahweh as the lord of that fertility of agriculture which ensures human alimentation and survival. The ideal landscape in the background of the texts is clearly an agricultural landscape (see also Talmon TWAT 685).

Further, the desert wilderness space comes to oscillate between a real and a phantasmatic presentation. For instance, the manna and the quails marvels have a supernatural cause, but the events are presented in a way that points towards a similar double readability between the natural and

32 It rots if stored, cf. Exod. 16:20.

33 It is not conspicuous consumption; everybody gets what s/he needs.

34 Manna is a heavenly, supernatural food, holy, and therefore fragile in the human world. The manna deposited at the (later) tabernacle (an instance of time warping, Exod. 16:32–34) does not decay, because here the nature of the food corresponds to the nature of the place.

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supernatural,[35] as well as between the benign and the malign. The text's similes (bread, Ex 16,4, frost v. 14) and modes of interaction (gathering, decaying) contribute to the search for naturalistic explanations, while still retaining the marvel. Exegetes have pointed to migrating quails and 'honey-dew', sweet pellets secreted by plant-lice, as possible natural explanations of these fantastic events in the desert wilderness (Durham 1987, 224; W.H.C. Propp 1999, 599–600). While naturalistic paraphrase of the marvels is an unconvincing interpretational strategy, it is important to note that the texts do not present manna as a spiritual food; it is a very concrete food that can rot and melt and which the Israelites use and interact with in ordinary ways.[36] The double readability between the ordinary ways one can interact with these alimentary marvels and their 'supernaturalness' contributes to the desert's oscillation between the real and the fantasmatic.

The predominant reactions of Israel within the wilderness (cf. table 2 above) are doubt (e.g., 16,2–3)[37] and disobedience (e.g., 16,20, 27–28). The doubt, rejection and disobedience of Israel in the wilderness is so pervasive and so striking—so improbable, considering all the fantastic events—that it requires interpretation. Israel's later interaction with Yahweh in the wilderness is also a story of Israel's apostasy and lack of obedience. Israel's apostasy is, in the context of Ex 15,22-Ex 18, unbelievable,[38] considering the recent, marvellous events in Egypt and the crossing of the sea. The statements of the Israelites in 16:3 that they believe to have been led into the wilderness to die, and of Moses in 16:6 that Israel will now know that it was Yahweh who led them out of Egypt speak out the possibility that there was no supernatural presence (or another) behind the fantastic events. This is a significant statement, for if we take the fantastic events of the narrative at face value then how could Israel possibly doubt that Yahweh led them out of Egypt – considering the plagues of Egypt and the crossing of the sea, the guiding pillars of fire and cloud? This sentence confirms the ambiguity of the wilderness space as

35 Ex 15,22–26 and the bitter to sweet water marvel is a further example of a double readability, cf. Feldt 2012, ch.3.

36 Generally Israel's wilderness experience is presented as concrete and bodily. It thus differs from the later ascetic use of the wilderness.

37 Childs also finds that the people's complaint constitutes unbelief (Childs 1974, 285, 287, cf. also Durham 1987: 220, 230–231).

38 Yahweh does slay thousands for impiety in the desert (Exod. 32; Num. 11; 16–17; 21:4–9) and does not allow the rest to enter into the land (Num. 13–14; 20:1–13).

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hovering between a realistic and a fantastic presentation. From this point on, when we hear of the disobedience, doubt and rebellion of the Israelites, we must remember that these reactions occur in a narrative context according to which Israel gathers its daily fantastic food, its daily miracle, every day (cf. above). This renders Israel's doubt, hesitation and disobedience even more extreme and noteworthy. I submit that these reactions become understandable if seen as reflecting an agricultural environment. I return to this in section 4.

The striking discrepancy between the fantastic events of Yahweh for the people and Israel's apostasy, disobedience and doubt characterises the wilderness more than anything. This discrepancy can be read as formulating a pressure towards self-transformation, towards obedience, belief, 'goodness', as communicating an ethos of religious transformation. I will return to this point in section 4.

B Instituting Wilderness: the mountain revelation, Sukkot, law, sanctuary

In the texts placed between Israel's entry into the wilderness in Exodus and the departure from Sinai and the further wilderness experiences in Numbers, decisive aspects of the religion and wilderness nexus are communicated. I do not offer full analyses of these texts, and many important issues cannot be treated here. However, I wish to point to a few aspects that I find important for the understanding of the wilderness and its religious function in the Pentateuch.

The importance of the dramatic episode in which Yahweh descends to the mountain in the wilderness to meet Israel in Ex 19 for the Pentateuch (and the Hebrew Bible) is difficult to overstate. The placement of the mountain of Yahweh's foundational revelation in the wilderness setting is emphasised in the first lines of Ex 19 with repetitive formulations that stop the action momentarily to emphasise the setting of 'the wilderness of Sinai' (*midbār Sînāy*). The ancient Near Eastern spatial paradigm of the cosmic mountain or mountain of god (Dozeman 1989,19–36) and the climactic moment of national formation and divine revelation is specifically placed in the "wilderness of Sinai" (Ex 19,1–3), demonstrating that the Hebrew Bible wilderness cannot be seen as solely negative in these texts. The text here draws on wider, ancient Near Eastern spatial paradigms of mountains as meeting places between humans and deities and as sites of divinely given fertility (Talmon TWAT 669–670 s.v. *midbār*; Simkins 1994,140), just as mountains are, in the Hebrew Bible generally, places of refuge and divine revelation (Cohn

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1981,13). The spatial placement of the mountain of revelation in the wilderness is highly significant as a statement about the wilderness' positive qualities.[39]

Moreover, the discrepancy between Yahweh's perspective and that of Israel is resolved here in the 2nd space imagery offered by the deity, when Israel's confusion, thirst, hunger, and doubt on the trek from Egypt (cf. fig. 2 above), through the wilderness to the mountain, are re-described by the deity as "an exhilarating swift, smooth flight" (Pardes 2000, 66) on the wings of an eagle,[40] casting the deity in the image of a caring animal parent and the people as his fledgling (Pardes 2000,65–68). In this re-description, the wilderness chronotope is a space of nearness to the deity, a time of great intimacy (cf. also the special designations offered to Israel if they keep the covenant: *sᵉgullāh mamleket kōhanîm wᵉgôy qādoš*, 19,5–6), and of parental care (cf. Dt 8, Dt 32). This moment of intimacy between deity and people, the moment of unity at the mountain in the wilderness, where the people respond as one and accept the terms of engagement, is of pivotal, positive importance in the religious imaginary.

It is also important to observe the vital role that the nonhuman world plays in this text about the deity's decisive revelation. Yahweh's manifestation is verbalized in terms of aspects of the non-human world. It is through cloud, lightning, thunder, fire, vivid images of a mountain set ablaze by dramatic natural phenomena, that Yahweh's presence is imagined. The deity's appearance on the mountain, in and through which the relationship between Israel, deity, and land are verbalized, regulated, mediated, is constructed in 'nature' images. The image of the thundercloud, lightning, etc. (Ex 19:18–20) are basically thunder storm images. The thunderstorm on the mountaintop is relevant mainly for the farmers of the highlands in Palestine, and while it was the source of great destructive power, it was also beneficial in that it brought the seasonal rains necessary for agriculture (Lang 1998,146–158; Hiebert 1996; Simkins 1994, 146). This offers further support to the argument that the landscape which stands at the centre of the wilderness narratives and which

39 In the narrative of Elijah's encounter with Yahweh's fantastic events on Mt Sinai/Horeb, the wilderness and the mountain are also explicitly connected (1 Kings 19).

40 This image is also taken up in Dt 32:10–11.

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is the focus of Israel's wishes is an agricultural landscape, and that the nonhuman world is of great importance in the Hebrew Bible.[41]

While the wilderness as a narrative frame space is of momentous importance in the Pentateuch, also for the law and cultic prescription materials, Sukkot is the only festal celebration explicitly prescribed as a ritual practice for remembrance of the wilderness events (Lev 23:39–43) within the Pentateuch/Torah wilderness framework. Sukkot is often seen as an originally agricultural festival connected to the (fruit) harvest during the dry season,[42] which was later ascribed a 'historical' background by being connected to the wilderness wanderings in Lev 23:40 (Spaulding 2009,41–42; 55–66). The commandment to 'dwell in booths' is connected to the exodus and wilderness wanderings in v. 42–43. Our understanding of the passage is not brought forward by observations that booths made of branches of green plants are impossible and anachronistic in the desert. Sukkot was prescribed as a time of joy, where the community would celebrate Yahweh's blessing, of which the fertility of the plants and the crops were seen as an expression. The present analyses of the wilderness stories show that the connection of Sukkot to the wilderness is not necessarily 'artificial' ascription[43] that marries a 'historical' concern on the one hand to a 'natural/agricultural' concern on the other, because the concern of the wilderness stories is also for agricultural fertility. The verbal forms involved stress Israel's dependence on Yahweh for survival (hipʿil of *yšb* and *yṣ*). In this way, a 'wilderness' perspective on agricultural fertility is offered. The connection between wilderness and Sukkot is intimate and meaningful in the religious imaginary: both the wilderness stories and Sukkot celebration concern human survival and the source of that fertility in 'agriculture-nature' that ensures human survival. To be sure, it is likely that the ritual prescriptions here marry a popular religious practice, an existing festal practice, to the wilderness stories, but

41 Often in biblical studies, nature/myth terminology is used of the other ancient Near Eastern cultures, while the Hebrew Bible gets the 'historical' predicate. But the image is much more complex – in the ancient Near East more broadly, deities were also seen as independent from the nature images with which they were characterised, and their sense of time was not necessarily 'cyclical' (Jacobsen 1987, Hendel 2005, 98–99; M.T. Larsen 1987, Albrektson 1967).

42 Jensen has pointed out how miraculous provisioning of food is related to the dry season, the season of abundance, of harvest, in the Hebrew Bible (Jensen 2000,514).

43 I do not rule out that the connection may be late; I just wish to point out that the connection is 'natural' in terms of the religious imaginary.

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the relevant distinction is not that between history and nature. In Lev 23, the regulations for the celebrations are not especially intended for priests (as they are elsewhere), and they are not applicable to one place only (Ulfgard 1998,80–81) – a more likely distinction is popular vs. elite. The interpretative character of Lev 23:43 is unique and probably connected to an 'early Judaism' marked by exilic experience (Ulfgard 1998,216–218). The concern for agricultural fertility is, in this text, deterritorialized. The ideology of the ritual practices surrounding Shabbat and Sukkot concern agricultural fertility just as the Torah wilderness stories do. Together they communicate that these religious practices are not connected to any particular place.[44]

Lev 26 corroborates the peasant-agricultural view of what Yahweh-religion is about: If Israel follows the instructions, Yahweh will provide the rain at the right time, so that the land can yield its crops and the trees their fruits, the deity will ensure fertility among humans and animals and in the nonhuman world, and he will take up residence among the people of Israel (Lev 26:3–13). Yahweh clearly acts and communicates in and through the nonhuman world; he is the deity who blesses 'nature' and nurtures animals, humans, and plants alike and makes them thrive and multiply.[45] This image is just as outspoken in this chapter's curses: if the people do not follow Yahweh's commandments, he will send illness, turn the sky and the land into metal, so that the land cannot yield crops and the trees no fruit, wild animals will attack, human and animal fertility will decrease, and as a climax: the land will turn into wilderness and the cities to ruins (Lev 26:32–36).[46] Then the land will, then, finally get its Sabbath rest, which Israel has denied to it by not following Yahweh's commandments (Lev 26:14–45). We see here what is the lived space of the recipients of these texts: the agricultural environment of small-scale

44 The 'Holiness Code' generally communicates further ideals about Israel's purity and separation (Ulfgard 1998,89). In the prescriptions for Sukkot found in Numbers (Num 29,12–38), normally seen as P material, the amount of offerings are enormous and the festival is more temple-oriented, which is unique in the Pentateuchal & Torah tradition (Ulfgard 1998,91), and there is no explicit connecting of the celebrations to the wilderness stories, except for their overall setting within the Pentateuch. In the Dt Sukkot texts (Dt 16:13–16 and 31:10–11), there is no mention of booths, and we see the deuteronomistic ideas of concentrating the cult to one place and the obligation of pilgrimage.

45 Cf. what Bernhard Lang states for other Hebrew Bible texts (Lang 1998,183).

46 The word that I translate "wilderness" here is *šemamāh*, connoting desolation, wasteland, more so than *midbār*. Note that the theme of the attack of enemies is allotted a minor amount of attention in this text.

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peasants who till the soil and tend their flocks, for whom the decisive function of the deity was the fertility (Lang 1998, 184) of the nonhuman world. This suggests that the peasant-pastoralist perspective plays a much larger role in the Pentateuch (cf. also Dt 7:12–14; Dt 11:14–15; Dt 26:15; 28:4–5) than is sometimes imagined.[47]

A final point is that the giving of the covenant and law and the ceremonious construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness space are further reconciliatory aspects that complicate the negative image of the wilderness often given in biblical studies. In the wilderness space, Yahweh and Israel renew and redefine their relationship. We see this also in the texts about the fashioning of the wilderness sanctuary (*miškan*). As Ilana Pardes points out, the people here get that "tangible emblem of divine presence" that they craved in the Golden Calf episode, and the seriousness of the official discourse is balanced with the play of recipient voices, which are to some extent met (Pardes 2000, 85). From here on, then, Israel carries a mobile, material space of revelation with them on their trek, and the dialogue of Ex 19–20 continues in the space between the cherubim. Mark George's recent analysis of Israel's tabernacle as social space emphasises the importance of the portability and mobility of the tabernacle space. The social nature of the tabernacle space shows that Israel's deity is not only mobile, but also presented as the lord of any space, also the wilderness, and that Israel's social identity can be recreated anywhere (George 2009, 179, 188–194). This feature of the mobility of social space should not be overlooked as communication about the wilderness chronotope and its religious function. The wilderness placement of not only Israel's birth as a nation, but also its most intimate encounters with its deity, its reception of the law and the cultic instructions, all of which are evaluated positively in the Pentateuch, offers a message of deterritorialization and mobility as integral to Israel's relation to the land's fertility. To this message Israel's political history of exile and threats of dispossession from larger nations, as well as the shifting and mobile firstspatial aspects of the *midbār* presented earlier, provide a key support of form. The connection established, in the texts with a wilderness setting, of the Sabbath to the wilderness, as a memorial practice (Ex 16), as well as the

47 Where Lang sees conflicting ideological patterns in the Hexateuch between the warrior and wisdom ideologies, and sees the Dumézilian third function as applying primarily to Genesis and Job (Lang 1998, 184), I see more continuity across the Pentateuch and I suggest to grant his third function a larger role within the redacted Torah.

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linkage between Sukkot celebration (Lev 23) and wilderness memory, support the communication that Yahweh is the lord of agricultural fertility even further.

C Wilderness vs. Land – Num 11–14

In Numbers 11–14, aspects of everyday life are introduced into the desert wilderness space that speak of how the distinction between the wilderness and everyday life in the land is constructed and negotiated.

Table 3. Actions, reactions, utterances Num 11–14

Yahweh's actions and utterances	
1. Marvels/fantastic events:	*Alimentary marvels:* Counterintuitive food work-free, sweet, falls from the sky with the dew, with regularity/ tedium effect: Num 11:6–9 General: provides food and drink for a hyperbolic amount (cf. Ex 12,37)[48] of people and livestock (cf. Ex 16,32) Hyperbolic amount of meat: Num 11:19–20.22 Counterintuitive storm bringing quails in specific area: Num 11:31 Hyperbolic number of quails brought by storm: Num 11:31–32 Land gushing with milk and honey: Num 13:27; 14:8 Gigantic grapes in the land: Num 13:23–24; giants 13:22, 32–33 Land destroys/devours its inhabitants: Num 13:32[49] Land gushing with milk and honey: Num 14:8

48 Num 1–4 confirm the phantasmatic number of people in the wilderness.

49 A general question that can be raised here is that of metaphorical expression and 'how far' these images should be taken. I have discussed this question somewhat in Feldt 2011c in relation to the metaphors used of Ninurta in *Lugale.*

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	Natural phenomenon'/'climate' marvels: Counterintuitive fire that consumes/kills (Num 11,1–3) Counterintuitive presence in cloud speaks to Moses: Num 11:25; Num 14,14 A speaking cloud pillar, pillar of fire: Num 12:5–10; Num 14,14 Counterintuitive cloud: Num 14:14 *The human body – fertility – death* Israel's exaggerated fertility/great number underlies: Num 11:10–15 and Num 11:21 Miriam from healthy skin to skin disease, semblance of death (*mᵉṣōrāʿat*), for seven days: Num 12:10, 12, 14–16 Plague/disease[50] caused by deity: Num 11:33 Counterintuitive killing of the spies: Num 14:36–28 *Other* Some of Yahweh's divine spirit transferred to seventy selected elders: 11:17, 25–26; when the deity's spirit dwells on them they prophesy (but do not continue): Num 11:25 Yahweh's *kbd* shows itself at the tent, superhuman voice speaks: Num 14:10
2. Other actions/utterances:	*Anger:* 11:1–3; 11,10; 11,19–20; 12:9.14; *Despair:* 14:11–12, 28–29, 33–35 *Detests* Israel: 14:27
Israel's / the people's actions and utterances	The Israelites break camp, wander, and rest when Yahweh's cloud communicates it[51] (passim; e.g., Num 9,15–23) *Complaint, rejection* Num 11:1–3; in Moses' words: 11,10–15 *Cry* for help to Moses against Yahweh's fire, rejection?: Num 11:2 *Distrust/rejection:* Num 11:4–5 *Rejection of ethnogenesis*, nostalgia for the food of Egypt, *doubt* of Yahweh's promises: Num 11:5; repeated in 11:18–20 *Rejection of Yahweh's gifts:* Num 11:6, 10, 13

50 For arguments that this means disease, see TWAT s.v. *nkh.*
51 See also (Ex 17,1; Ex 40,34–38; Num 21,10–15), (Num 9,15–23).

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	Rejection of Moses: Num 13:30 *Doubt and fear:* Num 14:1–4 *Rejection* of Yahweh and fear: Num 14:7–9 *Rejection* of Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Kaleb: Num 14:10

In Num 11, the daily life in the wilderness, with its continual exposure to the fantastic food, makes it tedious, everyday-like, for the people and they crave variation (Num. 11:5–6).[52] Yahweh punishes Israel's doubt and rejection by means of an excessive number of quails, which here turns into a punishment on which to choke (Num. 11:20). Vomiting so violent that the food comes out the nose, that is, food transgressing the wrong bodily limit, is a horrific image likely to evoke disgust. The provisioning of quails, a fantastic event which was previously salvific (Ex 16), is now marked as its opposite, horrific. Manna is also now reframed: it is everyday-like, tedious.[53] These interactions between the fantastic food and the inversion of their previous (Exodus) evaluation draw attention to what is ordinary and what is extra-ordinary, to the differences between life in the land and life in the wilderness. Presenting the fantastic food of the desert through the lens of everyday life enables a re-description of everyday food through the lens of the fantastic wilderness food. In this way, the fantastic character of ordinary food (fish, cucumbers, watermelons, leeks, garlic, etc., Num 11:5) is communicated. Surrounded by fantastic events in the wilderness, in the presence of the deity, eating marvellous food every day (Num 11:6), what the people want is the food of everyday life. By presenting the people's nostalgia for everyday life and everyday food, the text communicates about the lived space of its recipients, and the major issues relevant to it: in everyday life in the land, the people easily forget who is the divine source of alimentation. Everyday life implies the two dangers of following other gods and following none,[54] heresy (polytheism) and apostasy (cf. Dt 8). By again presenting the Israelites as apostate and doubtful, regardless of Yahweh's wonders, regardless of

52 This theme re-occurs in Num. 20:3–5 and Num. 21:4–5.

53 In spite of the presentation of manna as tedious, the text proceeds to describe the curious wonder of the manna in detail—its appearance and treatment, and also the provisioning of meat for the people is presented as a marvel (Num. 11:18–23). Both types of fantastic food are at once curiosities the reader is invited to marvel at (Num. 11:7–9, 21–23: manna is attractive, versatile, convenient, tasty) and yet represented as punishment/tedium (manna Num. 11:6, 10; quails Num. 11:19–20).

54 E.g., Dt 8,17: *kōḥî wᵉʿōṣem yādî ʿāsāḇ lî ʾet-haḥayil hazzeḇ*.

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the surface ideology of the deity and narrator and the gift of the laws and cult, the texts further emphasise the communication of Israel's identity as a discrepancy between what Israel is and what Israel ought to be, which amounts to a narrative attempt to install a desire to become "Israel" (as Israel ought to be).[55]

Num 13–14 concern the important transition to the new life with Israel poised on the threshold between the desert and the promised land. The coding of the two spaces of wilderness and land in the social imaginary is represented as a matter of controversy. Both areas are represented as oscillating between the real and the phantasmatic and both are represented by means of both positive and negative terminology. This is seen in the narrative of the first encounter with the land in Num 13. The list of names and lineage of the scouts in 13:5–15 contributes to the oscillation as do Moses' directions to the spies in 13:17–20. Considering Yahweh's repeated promise of a land flowing with milk and honey and of assistance in the conquest of the land, these directions are peculiar: they are to check whether the land is poor or rich (fertile), whether trees grow there, whether its inhabitants are strong or weak, few or many and so forth. This is not exactly a sign of a firm belief in Yahweh's promise of a land of abundance and help in conquest.[56] Divine help with the conquest is portrayed as equivocal,[57] Israel's relation to the land as insecure, and the land as hovering between a real and a fantastic presentation.

The land turns out to be peopled by giants, the descendants of Anak,[58] and the fruit that the scouts bring back is gigantic. At the entry of the land of promise, the land turns out to be too fantastic, it is so fertile that it is creepy, the homeland is *unheimlich*, and it scares Israel. What Israel yearns for is normal fertility, the fruits of normal everyday agricultural life, but what seems to be in store for them in the prom-

55 Therefore, the boundaries of Israel's identity are also porous: cf. that "recognition of Yahweh" is the basis for inclusion in Israel for P according to George (2010, 192).

56 The spies are sent on Yahweh's orders—does that mean that he is not sure himself? Mending this uncertainty, in Deuteronomy (Deut. 1:22–23, 37) the initiative comes from the people.

57 Milgrom mentions the possibility of the scouting as a test of faith because the men were chieftains, not trained scouts (*mᵉraggᵉlim*; Milgrom 1990: 100).

58 See H. Rouillard in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Brill, Leiden 1995) s.v. REPHAIM) for details. The connection to the rephaim as deceased or denizens of the realm of the dead only adds to their eeriness.

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ised land is fantastic-utopian, too bountiful for ordinary folk: it really (*gam*, 13:27) does gush with milk and honey, a phraseology which underscores the text's oscillation between the real and the fantastic. The utopian vision of the land of bounty is turned into its opposite, dystopia, in the words of the spies in 13:32, and the fundamental ambivalence towards the land in biblical religion (Pardes 2000,108), which is related to its phantasmatic-imaginary base, here comes out in the oscillation between a phantasmatic, motherly plenitude (milk and honey) and a cannibalistic appetite (Num. 13:32; cf. Pardes 2000, 114–115). The land is packed with others, and the old world of the patriarchs is not waiting there for Israel. The chapter ends as a threat fulfilled, when the Israelites, who in spite of Moses' warnings have attempted to conquer the land, are beaten (Num 14:45).

After Yahweh's punishment for the lack of trust in the wonders, the 'eyewitness' experience of the fantastic events of the Exodus and wilderness is sealed off within the desert space with the death of the Exodus generation (except for Joshua and Kaleb and the little ones, 14:30), and both the land and the wilderness are left in an oscillatory position between promise and threat, between the fantastic-utopian (milk and honey, giants, enormous grapes vs. a constant supply of manna, meat, and water, guidance) and the world of everyday experience (rich or meagre land, strong or weak inhabitants, tent camps or fortified cities, Num. 13:17–20 vs. thirst, alimentary deprivation, lack of orientation).

The wilderness of these stories sends signals in both directions: on the one hand, it is marked by the deity's guidance and marvels, but on the other these signs are revealed as ambiguous, repeatedly interpreted as caused by humans, rejected by the personae, and filmed over with elements from everyday life. While the texts clearly draw on existing, secondspace dichotomizing spatial paradigms of the wilderness and the land, with the land as the space of normalcy, home, plenitude, security, an accessible divine gift, and the wilderness as the region of lack and disturbance, of monsters, demons, and extraordinary events, of primordiality, these spatial paradigms are here reversed and presented for reflection; there is no simple transition from deprivation to fulfilment, from negative space to positive space, from wilderness to homeland. In the following chapters, the discord and disunity continues (15:32–36; 16:1–35;[59] 17:6–15) intermittently with the deity's orders (15:1–31, 38–41;

59 In Num. 16:13, the contingency of the fantastic constructions is blatant in the presentation of *Egypt* as the land of milk and honey.

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17:1–5), the people's rejection and Yahweh's supernatural punishments and killings (as in, e.g., Num. 17:14–15), as well as reflections on the nature, knowability and veracity of Yahweh's marvels in the wilderness.

The wilderness narratives do thus not present the election and fantastic ethnogenesis in the wilderness as something that ensures Israel's possession of the promised land; Israel's relation to the land remains fragile (Pardes 2000: 15). The wilderness experience does not present the people, or individual Israelites, as moral exemplars or faithful worshippers, as they easily forget Yahweh and turn to 'secular' explanation, doubt, rejection and/or syncretistic religious practices. The idea of an inviolable relation between people and territory is called into question in these texts.[60] The wilderness is characterised more than anything by the relation between Yahweh's fantastic marvels and the reiterated emphasis on Israel's rejection, doubt, and apostasy. What we see, I suggest, amounts to the formulation of an ethos of religious identity transformation for recipient-Israel.[61] These texts suggest to their recipients a discrepancy in "Israel" between what Israel is and what Israel ought to be, which models religious identity formation as continual transformation.[62] The distinctions that ground identity for Israel (wilderness–land, wandering–settlement, alimentary lack-agricultural fulfilment, etc.), are thus not choices between a first part and a second, but instead an abiding, constitutive tension.

4. Wilderness and Hebrew Bible Religion

In this section, I call attention to four aspects of the religious construction and function of the wilderness space in the Torah/Pentateuch brought out here and how these aspects are relevant for broader discussions of the religion and wilderness nexus in Hebrew Bible religion.

60 This does not rule out that such a relation may be central in other strands of theology in the Hebrew Bible (H.J.L. Jensen 2003; Brueggemann 1977.

61 Cf. D. and J. Boyarin's essay on diasporism (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993).

62 Pardes says that "Israel's weaning is both terminable and interminable" (Pardes 2000, 62–63) and so, it seems to me, indicates the processual nature of Israel's identity (see also Pardes 2000, 79–80). W.H.C. Propp, similarly, notes that "the rebellion traditions… advise the Israelites of the dangers of disobedience and the rewards of fidelity (Propp1987, 125).

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4.a. Ambiguity and transformation

As the above analyses show, the Hebrew Bible's wilderness idea is characterised by a continual slippage between the desert wilderness as natural-geophysical materiality and then the fantasy images of the desert in the social imaginary, between a realistic presentation and the fantastic marvels. The wilderness oscillates between a benign and a malign, a real and a phantasmatic, presentation, between terror and nostalgia, past and present, between Yahweh's bounty chamber and utter deprivation, between threat and promise, rescue and punishment. The desert wilderness ends up as an uncertain and ambiguous region, a hallucinatory wonder-object.[63] Contrary to much previous research,[64] which has focused on whether the Hebrew Bible wilderness was seen as primarily benign or malign, or on the wilderness as a real historical timespace and its chronology and concrete geography, the analyses here have shown that the wilderness is presented in an irreducibly ambiguous way. The wilderness' oscillatory position adds to its versatility as a space of experimentation, indeed, of testing, of the relationship between deity and people, of transformation and negotiation, of importance for religious identity formation. The wilderness of the Pentateuch is not presented as an area outside divine rule or the abode only of demons, or as an epitomical embodiment of 'nature'. The wilderness is a primary arena for intimate meetings with Yahweh,[65] it is a place of personal and communal religious transformation, where the relation and forms of communication between deity and humans are reflected upon, discussed, and negotiated. The wilderness is also a place of

63 The wilderness is thus not a wholly other world (contra Leach 1987, 586–587).

64 As mentioned, an exception is the ecotheological work of Leal, who stresses the extensive range of attitudes to wilderness encountered especially in the Hebrew Bible (Leal 2006, 223–25); Schofield also offers pointers towards a different view (2008).

65 While it is difficult for humans to survive there without divine help, the wilderness per se is not condemned or subjugated; it is a legitimate, necessary area. The presentation of wilderness differs from, e.g., the imagination of the wilderness as epitomized by an opponent monster, as in *Lugale* or *Inana and Ebih* (see Black et al. 2006). A comparative investigation with a Mesopotamian, and wider ancient Near Eastern "folkloristic" context is a desideratum, since in Mesopotamia at least it seems that the wild, open steppe, *ṣēru*, was the abode of wild animals, nomads, lawless people, enemies, and demons (cf. CAD s.v. *ṣēru*, Pongratz-Leisten 1994, 18–20). The idea of *ṣēru* as a social and cultural space in ancient Mesopotamia is, however, a topic that needs further investigation, and it is indeed possible that its positive qualities have been underestimated in previous research.

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marvels that communicate Yahweh's 'natural' 'fertility power', to which I now turn.

4.b. Food, fertility and lived space

The analyses have also brought out how the subject matter of the marvels has been overlooked as communication about the wilderness and about the deity. Above all, this subject matter communicates that Yahweh is the lord and donor of agricultural fertility. The marvels revolve around securing food and fertility from the non-human world, specifically the agricultural field; the wilderness marvels are imagined up against a farmer's environment – the wilderness is where the crops cannot grow (*'ereṣ nôšāvet*). This finding has consequences for traditional understandings of Hebrew Bible religion. Biblical scholarship has long argued, and in some quarters still does, that Hebrew Bible religion was, first and foremost, a historical religion, and the natural world unimportant to its concerns.[66] Based on the present analyses, it must contrariwise be noted that the ties of Hebrew Bible religion to the nonhuman world, as well as its ties to a particular human mode of engagement with the nonhuman world, namely agriculture, are strong.[67] This comes clearly to the fore in the wilderness stories, where deity and humans communicate through the medium of 'nature', where the aid Israel desires from its deity is expressed in 'natural' terms (fertility, food, crops, rain), where elements of the non-human world (fire, clouds, food, water) manifest the presence of the deity. It must thus be acknowledged that Yahweh as a deity is much more about "nature" than often thought in biblical studies. The narratives verbalise the interdependence of natural processes, deity-worship, and social identity; religious practice and the desired fertility in field, stable and bed as the deity's gifts are intimately linked. This study thus corroborates what scholars like Jensen, Lang, Propp, and Hie-

66 Hebrew Bible religion has been seen as very different from its ancient Near Eastern neighbours by not being bound to the cycles of nature or concerned with fertility. It seems that such a view of Hebrew Bible religion cannot be upheld (support for this based on other Hebrew Bible texts can be found in Hiebert 1996,143; Jensen 1998; Lang 1998).

67 In traditional biblical studies this is not a commonplace insight. However, in environmental studies, as Taylor's contribution to this volume shows, there is a strong tradition of connecting Judaism, Christianity and Islam to agriculture and imperialist expansion (Taylor this volume).

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bert have argued for other Hebrew Bible texts (Jensen 1998, 2000; Lang 1998; Hiebert 1996, 142–143; W.H.C. Propp 1987,127–128).[68] 'Salvation' is not out of this world to a world beyond, but a peaceful life in the land with an adequate supply of food and fertility. Importantly, the wilderness stories analysed here bring out human survival as fragile and Israel's relation to the agricultural land as tenuous and contingent on religious identity transformation.

As for the wilderness texts' spatial aspects, the conclusion is that the relevant *lived space* is not the desert and the culture of nomadic pastoralism, but the culture of mixed agriculture and pastoralism and the agrarian environment of the arable highlands of Palestine, that of grain-based farming combined with fruit and vegetable production and animal husbandry. The religion reflected and idealized here relates not to the desert, but to small-scale agriculture-pastoralism.[69] In comparative perspective, several Mesopotamian texts verbalize the wilderness up against an urban environment, which is praised and celebrated (e.g., the Sumerian Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh and Huwawa stories, as well as the Babylonian, Ninevite Gilgamesh epic). In the Hebrew Bible narratives, the wilderness represents a disregard of, literally a journey away from, urban life (cf. Oehlschlaeger 1991,48–49). In the Pentateuchal wilderness stories, we are presented with the point of view of outsiders to urban culture (Mob-

68 And as W.H.C. Propp says of the wilderness journey: "… the historical tradition commemorated the alternation of sterility and fertility *in space*, in the journeys of Israel from Egypt, via the desert, to the mountain spring in the desert or to Canaan. The power of providing water in the desert demonstrated, *a fortiori*, Yahweh's power to irrigate his own land" (Propp 1987, 127–128. Emphases in original). J. Blenkinsopp criticizes the focus on salvation history in Christian exegesis (2011, 176–178).

69 Leal seems to distinguish between wilderness, nomadism and pastoralism on the one hand and urban civilization, sedentarism, and agriculture on the other (Leal 2006). Instead, a distinction between small-scale farming mixed with animal husbandry and then city life of the greater ancient Near Eastern civilizations is more likely, and this is corroborated by some studies (which show that the economic basis was mixed between agriculture and pastoralism, that it was not an either-or; Pastor 1997, 10). Considering the mixed economy, a split between small-scale farmers / animal herders and large city civilizations is more likely than a split between pastoralism and agriculture. I also disagree with the assumption that since Israel is encouraged not to have relations with "agriculturally oriented people" in the Hebrew Bible then Israel is not itself an agriculturally oriented people (Leal 2006, 145). What Israel wants from Yahweh is the same as the "agriculturally oriented" "Cana'anites" – Israel is also an "agriculturally oriented" people.

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ley 1997,232; Gunkel 1913),[70] which may reflect the experiences of a people in the position of outsider in relation to more powerful urban cultures. Casting Israel's relationship with its god as forged in the wilderness, not in a city, and pointing clearly at small-scale farming and pastoralism as the desired way of life, these wilderness narratives may have been one way to actively discredit city life and large institutions in the exilic, post-exilic (cf. Lang 1998, 183; Dozeman 1996, 95–96) and Hellenistic periods, which was of continued relevance well into the Common Era. It is also worth pointing out that the wilderness is not to be domesticated and that conspicuous consumption is condemned;[71] land and humans alike are entitled to regular rest.

Israel's reactions to Yahweh's marvels in the wilderness are significant for understanding the religious function of the wilderness. In the wilderness, the forgetfulness and apostasy of the Israelites is unbelievable within the frame established by the narrative itself: if the marvels of the exodus, manna, water, the Sinai revelation, etc. are taken at "narrative face value", then the doubt and rejection of the Israelites is unbelievable. The agricultural everyday life of the text producers and recipients does go some way in explaining this: only in the framework of everyday, agricultural life, where Yahweh's presence is difficult to ascertain and easy to forget (cf. Dt. 8 and Dt. 32), is this doubt, forgetfulness and apostasy meaningful and predictable. Yet, I contend that this textual element has further consequences for the process of reception.

70 Gunkel already suggested that the Hebrew Bible adopts the point of view of Israel as a *Naturmensch* in their traditions about the premonarchical period (Gunkel 1913). He noted that Israel or Israel's heroic representative (in the Exodus and David and Goliath stories) defeats a technologically superior enemy through the agency of Nature itself, by means of a natural object at hand (a stone, the jawbone of an ass, a shepherd's staff). Samson triumphs because his wild strength is irrepressible. Also Dt 32,10 depicts the people of Israel in "wild man" terms as a foundling in the desert adopted by a divine godfather who nurses his son with honey from a rock (v13).

71 In Ex 16, the provisioning of food is dependent on the keeping of the law and the regulations. While the regulations are indeed presented as written, food and eating are presented as the elementary practice that leads to the understanding that "Yahweh is your god" (16,13). The model for food production is agricultural, while the model for food consumption is one of adequate supply – not conspicuous consumption. The rhetoric of violence of expansion and subjugation is aimed at the "Cana'anites".

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4.c. An ethos of religious identity transformation

Above, the importance of the embedded character reactions was noted. Israel's dominant reactions of doubt, rejection and apostasy in the face of the many marvels verge on the incredible within the frame set by the narrative itself. Not only does this point to the texts' lived space, but the reactions of the people in the wilderness also construct a discrepancy between an ideal – what Israel ought to be (devout, law-abiding, remembering Yahweh) – and a 'reality' – what Israel 'is' (apostate, disobedient, forgetful); a discrepancy which works as a call to transformation. The strong reactions of apostasy formulate the necessity of transformation towards an ideal, the aim of which is to secure Israel's continued access to the fertility of the agricultural land that is vital to survival. The wilderness narratives analysed here communicate that Israel's relation to the land is tenuous. The land is often placed in situations of dislocation and peril, or represented as endangered in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Num 13–14, Judg 6–9, et al.) The shifting and mobile location of 'wilderness' and 'land' areas refers to spatial practices inside the land (cf. section 3a of this paper, e.g., that out of the six regions of the land, one is designated *midbār* (Talmon TWAT). The wilderness is thus an integral and mobile part of the geography of the land, just as it is an abiding tension in the religious identity of "Israel". The reactions of the text-internal personae not only reflect recipient responses but also suggest an itinerary of identity formation for the recipients – an ethos of religious transformation. The wilderness narratives communicate an invitation to regard religious identity as unfinished. The religious function of the wilderness lies in its ability to maintain contradictory aspects in a productive tension, thus enabling, modelling, a continual work of self-creation, in the recipient, towards a more ideal "Israelite". Through the discrepancy between ideal and reality in Israel's responses to the marvels, in the depiction of 'Israel' as internally split, an ethos of religious identity transformation is verbalised.

4.d. Wilderness Memorial Practice?

In his book *Not Bread Alone* (2009), Nathan MacDonald analyses food as a vehicle for memory in Deuteronomy. In the Exodus and Numbers wilderness narratives, I suggest, food is also set forth as a memorial practice; food production / consumption and Sabbath observance are incorporated

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forms of memory that further the inscribed memory (for these distinctions, see Connerton 2003, 76–79). In both Ex 16 and Num 11 narratives, everyday, agricultural food production is filmed over by the memorial narratives of the wilderness, because manna, as shown above, functioned as an inversion of normal, agricultural practice. The texts – the inscribed memory – attempt to evoke an incorporated memory in this way. The Sabbath, according to Ex 16, provides a temporal abstention from the gathering of manna. The connection of the Sabbath to the manna in the wilderness thus supports the communication that Yahweh is the provider of the fertility of the agricultural land, that humans are not the real owners or producers of food and land. Through the everyday, agricultural production of food and the weekly Sabbath observance, recipient 'Israel' is joined to the 'Israel' of the wilderness narratives. Agricultural food production and Sabbath observance are incorporated memorial practices of a type that can be repeated anywhere; they are very mobile anchors for religious memory. Their wilderness origin adds another layer to this mobility, as it offers a deterritorialized perspective on the land area and a 'theodicy' for Israel's life outside of the land.[72]

The specific literary form used here also presents both 'wilderness' and 'land' spaces as ambiguous and subject to multiple interpretations. Interestingly, while writing and textuality are not the subject of explicit reflection and stipulated memory practice in these texts, as for instance in Deuteronomy, the only access to the wilderness is here through text and narration. As we can see, there was a preference for the preservation and transmission of a multivocal wilderness tradition. The textual practices to which the wilderness narratives bear witness clearly recognize the multiple possibilities of interpretation. The multivocality of the desert tradition may indeed be an expression of cultural and ideological ambivalence,[73] which is what meets the recipients of these texts. It is fair to assume that the desert's ambiguity is socially formative in specific ways. What S. Fraade argues for the later rabbinic textual practices (Fraade 2007,12–14), I suggest is equally pertinent for the preservation and transmission of the Torah itself, namely that the texts depict interpretation of the marvels of the wilderness and the wilderness space itself as originary to it (Fraade 2007,26), and as multiple. This encourages the recipients to recognize, apprehend, and produce multiple understandings of

72 Brueggemann says that the land is a gift from Yahweh, that its fertility is not inherent and its possession not inalienable (1977, xii, 2, 54).

73 This does not rule out that it is also an expression of sedimentary source layers.

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spatiality as a response to varying situations. It is at the redacted textual stage that the texts are performatively and dialogically engaged by their recipients. At this stage, the wilderness events are represented as ambiguous, and access to the fertility of the agricultural land as contingent on religious transformation. This transformation is based on legal, ritual, narrative practices based in and on *text*. The reuse and rewriting of, and intertextual references to, the wilderness narratives and events within the Hebrew Bible itself (e.g. between Exodus and Numbers's versions of the manna marvel) further speak of a writing-oriented culture in which the ongoing development of the tradition was a literary-textual activity. The ambiguous narrative representations of Israel's wilderness origins were hardly motivated by an interest in history and nor do the interest in and valuation of the nonhuman world and fertility support the designation of 'historical' religion. Rather, the desire was to anchor, model, and authorize certain religious identity formation practices. In these wilderness texts, everyday food production, Sabbath observance, and Sukkot celebration are the means used to anchor the wilderness memory both in everyday life and in the yearly communal celebrations, as an incorporated-inscribed memory that presents the religious identity of the social group Israel as unfinished and access to the desired fertility of the land as contingent on religious transformation. As such, it is a 'theodicy' for Israel's existence away from the land, for this group's mobility.

5. Conclusion

The wilderness is, in the Hebrew Bible, a crucial domain. It plays an important role in and for Hebrew Bible religion and it functions as an arena for reflection on, and negotiation of, central issues and tensions in religious identity. The analyses have shown that the wilderness of these Hebrew Bible texts is presented as irreducibly ambiguous, that it oscillates between a malign and a benign, a realistic and a fantasmatic presentation, and that this enhances its versatility for processes of transformation. The subject matter of the wilderness marvels is used to communicate that Yahweh is the donor of the fertility of the agricultural land, which among other things shows that the lived space of the texts is the mixed culture of agriculture and pastoralism, not desert nomadism. The fruits of the material, agricultural world are celebrated and longed for, the deity's manifestations come in natural terms, and "salvation" is not out of this world but into an unscathed everyday life. The reactions of rejection of

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the Israelites in the wilderness were interpreted here as reflecting and modelling lived-space recipient responses[74] and as reflecting an agricultural everyday life, as well as playing an important role in verbalizing an ethos of transformation. By bringing out the tension between ideal and reality in the social group of "Israel" (the unbelievable apostasy and forgetfulness vs. the marvels and the clearly formulated ideals, rules, regulations), the wilderness narratives achieve their pedagogical aim: to communicate the idealized response of religious transformation to the recipients.

This analysis thus offers cause to question and nuance traditional, dichotomous cosmological grids in favour of a sharper focus on the concrete production of space, on the specific literary form and literary strategies of religious texts with regard to space, and, not least, on the effects of the literary form on the process of reception. The religious texts that may embed, produce, sanction and /or negotiate specific spaces and spatial practices may affect the process of reception in variable ways.

Based on these analyses, Hebrew Bible religion as embedded and espoused in these texts is a religion which focuses on this world in the specific sense that it is not about anticipating an afterlife in a transcendent, supernatural, other-worldly realm, but a religion that values "nature", the materiality and fertility of the non-human world (Taylor 2005, x).[75] Consequently, it seems fair to say that the traditional distinction in exegesis between "nature" and "history" does not serve these texts well. The wilderness narratives of Exodus and Numbers reflect that the deity steers the order of nature and, in particular, the processes which produce crops and offspring. What interests the producers and recipients of these texts is what Yahweh does, and they communicate clearly about this: he is the

74 Of course the wilderness of these texts could function as a second-space paradigm for its recipients. But, as shown, a spatial paradigm can reflect, incorporate, and use thirdspace experiences and emotions.

75 It is often helpful to distinguish between nature-as-sacred-religion (in which nature is worthy of reverent care) and the "natural dimension" of religion, which encompasses the entire "religion-and-nature/religion-and-ecology"-field (Taylor 2005,x, cf. Albanese 1990), but it seems to me that neither term is apt for religion in Mesopotamia or for Hebrew Bible religion. These are religions in which the desired exchange goods, between transempirical beings and humans, are "natural" and immanent; in which salvation is not about rescue from this world, but where the emphasis is on securing survival and an unscathed life in the "here and now"; where humans need to entertain relations with the deities / deity imagined to control "nature", or specific domains in "nature", in order to survive (to get food, fertility, health).

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donor of agricultural, "natural" fertility,[76] but he is also a mobile deity who may be worshipped elsewhere than in the land. In this perspective, possession of the land, and the access to agricultural fertility, is made contingent on religious transformation. The wilderness stories respond to the problems of the contingency of Israel's' possession of the land, and the fragility of the social group of "Israel". The answer they present is a religious ethos of transformation and a deterritorialized perspective on the land.

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76 As Dozeman points out for Deuteronomy, the focus on the mountain of god, Sinai/Horeb, in the wilderness amounts to a criticism of the urban Zion theology (Dozeman 1989). This wilderness conception thus speaks also of the social space of the authors, who were, likely, part of a cultural elite removed from the land during the exile and some of whom returned to Palestine in post-exilic, Persian times (cf. Dozeman 1989, 1998). Blenkinsopp (2011,180) notes that the political developments in Judah of the 6th century BCE made it easier to release the deity from territorial and ethnic attachments. The deterritorialized perspective was clearly of continued relevance into the Common Era and beyond.

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